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and Selected Poems

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COARCTATE:

ANTIGONE'S RETURN
AND
SELECTED POEMS

MARK DANIEL COHEN

INTRODUCTION BY
CAMELIA ELIAS

EyeCorner Press

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Coarctate: Antigone's Return and Selected Poems

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A Touch of Tongues

Mark Daniel Cohen's
Coarctate: Antigone's Return and Selected Poems

by Camelia Elias

Introduction

In this new volume that gathers together a new play in one act, "Coarctate: Antigone's Return," and a series of poems written over the span of several years, Mark Daniel Cohen presents us with what can be termed configurations of geometrical perceptions of experience in words, acts, and restraints. The meaning of the word *coarctate* indicates as well a more clinical and stark usage of senses that are made not only to embody restricted forms but also to form chain reactions within these restricted forms. To coarctate means to constrain to an oval form, or to disseminate in a well-defined, yet constricted form. The term can also describe the state of some insects' last larval skin in a pupae. In chemistry *coarctate* covers a topology of the redistribution of electrons where what is constraint also undergoes metamorphosis, or finds itself in a transition state. A state of nothingness of hollowness. In physics, the idea of a hollow sphere is bound with the law of symmetry regarding mass distribution. As a general rule, a hollow sphere does not produce any net gravity inside. While the hollow core exists, it acts as if it didn't, at least as far as the gravitational field is concerned. This field remains the same irrespective of having a hollow core, and thus irrespective of the co-existence of nothingness located at the centre.

In Mark Daniel Cohen's writing we find a profound concern with how words can follow both a constricted form while at the same time also following a form that can be said to non-exist. Words have gravity, to be sure, but this gravity is more of the kind that one finds in Gaussian physics and mathematical analysis. Gauss's law is an application of the conservation law, which states that you never lose flux. In math flux equals divergence multiplied by its mass. Without getting too technical, one can use this analogy between the way in which nature seems to work, tending towards maintaining the property of flux conservation, and how art works, tending towards breaking conservatism. One way in which the latter can be achieved is by forcing gravity astray, as it were, or by condensing dimensions. In mathematical analysis what is interesting are not the questions pertaining to how dimensions work, and how many they are, but how a continuous line works in relation to its intersecting points. When a work of literature is akin to the way in which a line can be said to mirror the point, then, what we are dealing with can be said to be a case of creating gravity in vacuum. Structurally, words gravitate towards limit points, they converge, yet thematically, they can be said to diverge. In Cohen's work, the characters in the play and speakers in the poems move towards converging to limit, while exploiting the way in which the elements of what is enunciated are structurally at odds with the underlying thematic action. They communicate an expressionless affect, yet this affect is one of unending passion and one which consolidates the idea that what ought to be appreciated in any poetic language is what resists full comprehension.

Everything Speaks

> **Creon:** All my prayers are that: The prayer of my desires.
>
> **Antigone:** For this I feel no twinges of regret. And if you judge me fool, perhaps it is because a fool is judge.
>
> — SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*

Although written independently of each other, the play "Coarctate," with its continuous one-act, is well complemented by Cohen's supreme command of the iambic pentameter in the poems. In both sets of texts the sound flows beautifully through alliteration and assonance. Feelings as passionate as in the ancient Greek drama are conveyed through an intelligence constricted to form, yet while the feelings are recognizable as most vulnerable and thus marked by a certain sense of finitude, they also rest on the movement of ideas towards infinite potential.

In the minimal stage directions for "Coarctate," Cohen instructs that "the actors are not to invest," as their roles are written as masks, not portrayals. This is quite significant, as the words placed in the actors' mouths are thus constrained to conveying a manipulation of facial forms and gestures as far as the veil, or the mask, can allow for. What is behind is precisely the potential to reveal more than what is understood by seeing 'feeling' in action.

As with the ancient Greeks, for whom feelings were always the subject of whimsical agency, thus rendering absurd the whole of humanity, so does one find in Cohen's take on art a similar approach, although here, what one senses above all is not the idea that some are more fated than others, but that especially the fated ones wish themselves to be free in that pure form that can only be attained on an abstract level. As the subtitle to the play suggests, "Antigone's Return," there is more in the flight towards abstract freedom than meets the eye. The doomed one returns to be freed from having to act due to a heightened sense of morality. Sophocles's Antigone has to pay with her life for crossing Creon's injunction to not have Polyneices, her dead brother, be properly buried. As she insists on having the ritual, she constrains herself to a moral duty, thus relinquishing her own right to live. Creon gives in to his weakness, which is the fear of losing face if he were to change his mind and not have Antigone be buried alive for her 'crime.'

In Cohen's play, Antigone's feelings are what they are, but her intelligence, surpassing the codes of morality, has more potential. It is this potential that Cohen exploits, suggesting a reversal of the cliché which dictates that what cannot be measured is feelings while intelligence can be assessed with more accuracy insofar as we have context to rely on. The play, in this sense, can be said to operate with how the measurable is pitted not against the unmeasurable, but against calculated, yet infinite thought. In Cohen's play the two protagonists are good at counting, though it is shown that Antigone's arithmetics, as it were, are better than Creon's. Also in the stage directions we find the indication that all movement should emulate the certainty of a well-wrought and well-choreographed ballet. If the body is to break down, then it has to do so by suggesting simultaneously that the snapping of the mind follows the pattern devised by the choreographer for the body to follow. In other words, one is allowed to mentally break down, but only to the extent that the break itself can indicate a coarctate transition state from calculated passion to cold fire: one's own and the other's. Cohen's Antigone has a condensed mind and a coarcted body. Her first lines indicate as much, and one senses what is at stake in her discourse by wondering what all her words mean.

> Dueness is raw.
> Amber seething chafes in supple fluxions,
> Implicating teeming.
> Darkness lamprey, inch and pull my chamber,
> Braid my gardens, curling steep and numberless,
> Amethyst and numbness, stitch syncopic volumes
> Airless, breathed dimensional.
> Linger savors, emerald-dense, and flocking.
> Reverie cauldrons, steams to a raveling,
> Silks flue, sills fluting, rapt in immuration,
> Quails density of stunting tones
> And strains to mist in sculpturing ascent.
> Stone stars catch the quaver, eye the new night spume;
> I, sudden to the night rise, shudder,
> Lift to looming gestures, statuary of my various resolves,
> Compressed to purposes, coarcted, crushed
> To concentrated senses, fume.
> Compacted figures, fire, as if diamond mind the dying mire.
> Coagulate to underset amends my long transition.
> The calcic ground streams under broken, unsought mounds.
> Proclivity's cocked to a nod.
> New passions urge the soil.

It is clear from the outset that even if one does not get the words, one gets the form. Antigone here is not merely a woman who weeps for her fate and does what is right for her brother. She is a sculptor who understands carving and its aesthetic implications. She is a jeweler who understands cuts. And a mathematician who understands infinity. Antigone knows she is beautiful in her mind because she is not afraid of following a line of potential thought. Antigone is not much for dimensions. All she wants is movement forward and unfolding unto vast spaces. The more male-resonating words, and which we find in the passive — "proclivity's cocked to a nod" — are here set in contrast to Antigone's wide spaces. If Antigone digs, she digs not below herself but ahead of herself. Enters Creon: 'let's have some depth here,' his language suggests, thus also corroborating the idea that, just as in the Greek drama, Cohen's Creon understands nothing, or very little, to begin with. "You shall have his grave," he says, in reference to Antigone's presence to meet her fate. Creon digs depth, yet not in a language that is his own. He steals the words of others. His sole authentic agency consists of commanding silence. He orders silence from Antigone, and one gets the sense that he can never rise to the task of seeing through his own acts because he is too enwrapped in his own dictations. But what does he dictate? When Antigone asks him:

> Is this impressed immensity of silence settled
> Thick enough to lodge my surging doom?
> Is it damp enough to waive a destiny?
> His eyes were wet enough to weep eternity.

Creon answers: "Yours is the last." Ever the man of action, Creon thinks that he is even above formalism, yet his way of keeping it simple, while being devoid of empathy, is not devoid of a love/hate ambivalence. Although Antigone entices him to take a different course of thinking and action by offering herself as an example of what could be more interesting to be done to her rather than merely having her die — "meteorize my ghostly capabilities," she says — and although Creon can also speak a meta-language, by constantly referring to the previous play in which they were also playing tragic actors, namely in Sophocles's original play, he cannot match her discourse. Creon would like to "meteorize" something, but he does not know how, and Antigone is the last one he would go to for advice. Here, it is Cohen's merit to instill in his spectators a moment of familiarity with these characters, even as he is defamiliarizing the Greek myth, as we all feel like asking ourselves: who exactly do these two remind us of, for we know them well among the ones we have encountered. The language of thinking and the language of action thus meet the language of domesticity. In this language, things are very simple indeed. When Creon says: you must die, and this whole thing must die with you, Antigone is more skeptical and merely asks: really? Antigone's fate can be decided and dictated, but whatever the shape the dictation takes, she always returns. This is the nature of form, to continue what is meant to continue. In principle, we can all understand such an exchange between couples, even when they are not together in any intimate form. And one can sense the tenderness in Creon's gaze upon Antigone, but it is of little help when he is intent on doing what he thinks he has got to do. He is thus cruel in spite of knowing better. As Antigone is a perceptive woman, she knows already what prompts Creon's acts, and consequently forces herself to remain implacable.

On a more sophisticated level, yet delivered in an equally straightforward manner, what we encounter here is also the very mechanism of ambiguity. For although both of these characters embody their roles reluctantly, they remain inflexible and faithful in their devotion to their acts. This renders them ambiguous characters where the juncture of feeling with form occurs. In other words, they both do what they think they've got to do, but it is clear that they would prefer not to. Passion rules, but it goes the wrong way, the principled way. It is also therefore that Antigone is buried alive, and Creon lives to regret it. In Cohen's play, there is a bending of passion towards potential, and life thus continues to pulsate in the very 'I prefer not to.' In Cohen's play, they both say, 'I prefer not to see you or read you as you offer yourself to me either as an image or as a text.' The move is thus for what transcends the gravity of words and towards desires that can actualize beyond articulation or principle.

This reminds us of another tragic character, namely Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, who ends up dying from inanition in a similar way to Sophocles's Antigone. He ends up passionately eating his own words, as it were, but they do not serve him as proper nutrition. In Cohen's play, one senses a desire on the writer's part to investigate what makes food for thought, and when thought is articulated, what happens if it is taken back, or eaten, by the one who articulates it. Quite literally, we often say about verbal situations that we can take them back, that we can take our words back, or that we can bury them within ourselves, or that we can eat them as a way of punishing ourselves for having uttered them. Here we have phrases that pass from mouth to mouth in a movement that creates a reaction which repeats itself and within which thought itself speculates on nothing. Yet, while Creon thinks that he is entitled to ask Antigone to follow his advice: "Speculate on nothing / More than strength" he says, it is also clear that Antigone's reply to him, by using the exact same phrase, rings another bell for both ideas, nothingness and speculation, than what Creon intends for her to understand. Firstly, in the original play, Antigone has a legal claim to the throne, now usurped by Creon, and secondly, she seems to know Creon in a different way from the way in which he knows her. This subtle knowledge is what transpires in Cohen's play, as it remarkably captures the geometry of the thought at work, which is hollow at the core precisely at the moment when it is stretched in opposite directions by the ones who use the exact same form of expression to manifest contradictory laws of attraction. Creon is not an idiot, to be sure, but he insists on his principles as the person and the king that he is at the expense of the potential of thinking mutability in the face of the immutable law. In Cohen's play it is clear that Creon's actions are a way of relegating his own ambivalence and inflexible ways to what he claims is Antigone's "essentially obtuse, and poor philosophy of action." Only, Antigone doesn't have a philosophy. To her it's all about watching and waiting for things to happen. Learning, for her, comes from paying attention. If she doesn't act, it's because she is waiting for Creon to act beyond 'ultimate' principles. Therefore she says: "to do nothing is superfluous... at this time." Also around this point, Cohen's protagonists take a Beckettian turn: before their fates fulfill, they realize that they are nothing. They are not even born, as it were.

Hence they realize that nothing can be done for them. And yet. As a latter day Beckettian Tristan and Isolde, they play an unending game of chess in which they both have a winning strategy. It is the strangeness in this paradox and in this 'nothing can be done' that keeps them going, as it wraps around both their passionate thinking of each other and their rational guesses about who will speak and who will make the next move. In the meantime, Creon can keep mocking and Antigone can keep knowing better.

The continuous form of the dialogue between them is punctured by points at which an implied author's voice warns about the dangers of analyzing things to death. Saying too much. The spectator is thus invited to watch, much in the same manner that Antigone does even as she talks, rather than make up his or her mind about what is going on. For what is going on is also a process in which form itself is in transition. There is the form of the dialogue, following the traditional adjacent positions — she said, he said — but then there is also the form that tends towards geometrical symmetry that takes place within the content of the play. As Antigone remarks, making meta-references to earlier versions of the Sophoclean plot, "as it was a story, something else was meant," she establishes precedents that she wishes to match across history. That something else is always meant becomes almost a mantra that Cohen wants us to be reminded of, insofar as mis-communication is as old as myth-making. Even when things change, something else is always meant, and yet it is precisely herein that the biggest potential lies, including the potential to actually have some things unchanged in the face of nothingness or flux itself. "There are emblems of danger in these difficult remains," we hear the implied author's voice saying, thus passing judgement on the nothing that is and which flows constantly along the gravity of things placed at the core or in the margins.

In Creon's relation to Antigone there is a constant tension of balance, which keeps ambivalence itself in a state of coarctate transition. He both wants her to die, and yet he wants her not to. He both fears her, and yet he doesn't. He both wants her for himself, and yet he doesn't. Antigone meets him in all his polarity, but her swerving between poles is not gravitational but one of lightness of being. Cohen's Creon wants Antigone to speak to him in a simple language that he can understand, but she retorts back that she would rather be broken into darkness. She knows, of course, that while Creon insists on speaking in a language that is below hers, anticipating her descent into the nether regions, she also knows that he understands much more than he lets see. Antigone's knowledge infuriates Creon, because it renders him impotent and frustrated. As he refuses to speak her language, he is forced to lie to her. The crux of the play is in its suggestion that Creon's core is not hollow. And yet, however much Antigone insists on banging on it, the sound that comes out of it is one of emptiness, as she is presumed not free. She cares for her brother above the law that the potential lover has promulgated and which holds her in a bind. In the face of Antigone's situation, having to submit to Creon's law, which he insists on upholding, Creon not only knows what he knows — that there is always a law above one's own, thus agreeing with Antigone's point — and therefore knows better — that as soon as there is a law, there is also transgression — but he prefers not to know. Creon's evading the knowledge that Antigone's logic instills in him makes him abusive. He thus strikes her both verbally and physically, desiring her silent.

But Antigone's silence takes new forms all the time, as she speaks the language of transfinite numbers. She counts *ad infinitum*: "the silence of the mob is its one lie. / The silence of the soul's its only truth." When they meet in arithmetics, however, as Creon also states: "I fall beneath the law of natural sequence," then, they are fine. The question is thus one of numbers: the natural numbers versus the real ones. In mathematics, the first set is encompassed by the latter. And whereas the natural numbers are countably infinite, the real numbers are uncountably infinite. Because of this entanglement, and in spite of Creon's victimization of Antigone, his discourse continues the ritual of embedding non-transient beauty that we find in numbers. Thus he says:

> We are gripped close in this.
> There is a general scheme. A universal calculation,
> Which I cannot explain to you.
> We two are wheeled on one fate, bolted to a single rim.
> We two are carted here together.
> We share a tense breaking inevitability.
> Together, we submit, the eternal thought.

Before the play's denouement, Cohen's structure reveals a few thematic paradoxes as well. Two, to be more precise, which in the end resolve in an act of pleading for mercy. The first regards the question of worship. The more the plot advances, the more it is clear that Creon worships Antigone, but as he does not want to admit it, it has consequences for the way his ambivalent feelings towards her unfold. Now he loves her, now he doesn't, and yet, even when he doesn't love her, he still loves her. On a more general level, the point is that when people worship other people, their actions run counter to their beliefs. Which is also the reason why the worshiped subject can quickly turn into an abject. If women escape sacrificing, then they become the sacrificers, engaging in the sacrificial ceremony as a matter of rite rather than right. They detach themselves from their subjectivity, and hence relinquish all claims to getting vindicated. Consequently, the more detached, the more hated rather than revered they end up being.

The second paradox regards the law, or the immutable divine. Also here as a general rule, when people worship gods, their beliefs run counter to their actions. Which is the reason why the gods can quickly provide platforms for forgiveness. We can commit any crime in God's name, because it is precisely God's name that justifies the act. So we attach ourselves to the name. Consequently, God always ends up being more revered rather than hated. In Sophocles's *Antigone*, Zeus's law is constantly invoked by Antigone as being more primary and more original than Creon's law. She thus justifies her act of disobedience by making recourse to higher orders. Now, the ambiguity that arises from texts that operate by exploiting the difference between gods and mortals indicates how high the poetic level is. In real life, how many can claim to perform ambiguity on purpose with a view to creating poetry of the highest mark? As the early Greeks showed, ambiguity in life is merely the sign of ambivalence, and demonstrates, if anything, how frail rather than how tragic our experiences are. We like to think that we can dramatize, and live grand lives, but, alas, what we do, for the most part, is create little narratives, which also, for the most part, are more insignificant than significant.

Cohen's play demonstrates that the recognition of one's frailty rather than one's tragedy is stronger in its impact on the way in which we are able to relate to his characters, for it is not difficult to understand Creon's agony, as he cries to Antigone not to go, and not to let go of him. The only invocation that he can utter and which can counter the law of action is thus a personal one that involves the enunciation of his position. In spite of what he says, or how he acts, Creon is against fallacies of discontinuity, precisely because he recognizes in Antigone a matching potential for a continuous relation. Moreover, he has her word for it as well: she will not let go of him, because she said that she wouldn't. They are thus both 'anti-gone,' as it were. And it is also for this reason that the idea of return is central to the play, even as it is only subtly hinted at. Thus says Creon in a broken voice, followed by Antigone on his wavelength:

> Drench me, dear Antigone, rinse me in your sorrow,
> Sight me once again with your streaming vision,
> Clear me in your dripping seas.
> In your revolt you lifted an authority,
> Grant me now your mystery in mercy.
> Acquit me and absolve me.

And Antigone answers in symmetry:

> Behind the surface sheen I sensed a depth...
> And a tender pull, a forward secluded and melting...
> I looked to search that soft infinity
> But, with every movement, my vision blocked my vista.

Cohen's play is thus a lament on the kind of love that exceeds the ordinary. We recognize ourselves in the characters, and yet, their mysterious vulnerability remains bound to the ineffable. As Creon grows more and more confident in his language, however, he reduces his acts, not to condemning Antigone to stillness, but to a standstill of love. "Forgive me, my Antigone," he says, submitting to her, and insisting on being present for her, and over her. "Know that I'm here," he seems to say as he urges her to match his discursively continuous line. In Cohen's play, the line: "Antigone, continue it," is thus the most significant. Yet, as Antigone remarks a few lines later, "The plot is at halt," she thus suggests the results of her coarctate transitions in the void: her victory, but also his as well. Cohen marks this moment in parenthesis saying: "(Silence. Antigone smiles. She has won)" and then letting Antigone speak in the language of the implied author, thus entangling Creon's lower orders once more with the language that is now made theirs: "fresh tongued and forming timelessly before the infinite, / Framing ancient passions."

Along these lines, it makes sense to hear Antigone elaborate on how, after eluding Creon's cruelty — "I have avoided your succession, eluded your eternity. / And I have spun another, in absentia" — she has managed to create something out of nothing, an eternity that has an even higher cardinality than Creon's. At this point in the play, the dialogue is transformed into a prose poem, and Antigone begins to tell a story. The lines are longer, the story has plot, characters, setting, character relations, symbolism, rhetoric, and all the other elements one finds in narrative. As the play is brought to an end via an almost fairytale detour — boy meets girl, girl meets boy, and they want each other — yet with Creon exiting the scene through the exact same point he appeared and Antigone sinking into darkness in the exact same way she has done before, the moral seems to be one of universal indictments passed on all lovers: nothing can be done. Let them be, they are merely in love. The test of timeless and unending love is still time, and still a passing, of time and passion "where knowledge brings with it a grace," as Cohen aptly puts it. In this sense, passion can be either witnessed or experienced, never compressed, never eluded, never coarcted.

In this sense, one can contend that what Cohen has achieved here is simply to have written a classic. The text speaks to us all. It speaks everything, and lets everything itself speak.

Everything 'Tells'

> Why a sad tale Mamillius?
> Rather a tale of trust.
> — SACHA RABINOVITCH, *A Winter's Tale*

The dramatic mode in "Coarctate: Antigone's Return" is followed in this volume by logical lyrics. The poems form a similar incantatory tone as in the play, yet the attention to language is here even more high-strung. The letters perform words, and the words perform themes and variations on what we find beyond signification, beyond symbolic language, beyond geometry, and even beyond nothingness. Here, one gets the sense that while thoughts open themselves onto vast potentials, the music of the words that accompanies them creates a constant feeling of something being sculpted. And one likes what one sees. The tension is between stable emotion and volatile ideas, rather than the other way around. Phrases that suggest a reversal of the belief in the stability of ideas, or an *idee fixe*, and the ephemerality of feelings abound, and the epigraph from Martin Gardner to the first poem, "The Hollow at the Core," almost says it all: "There is still a difference between something and nothing, but it is purely geometrical and there is nothing behind the geometry." Insofar as this poem almost performatively seems to strike a hollow core in the reader's experience of the transition from the play to the poems, it can be said to not only resonate with some of the themes in the play, but also anticipate a continuation of these themes into the rest of the poems. Thus, although this set of texts was written before the play, it almost seems to be encompassed by the thoughts formulated there. At least where the woman is concerned. There is only one woman who is worth the while, and she is also the last to last. Another Antigone passes, but not from the speaker's mind. Several poems are thus dedicated to a dead-and-yet-undying-in-form beauty, as her figure emerges geometrically as non-transient. Although there is no body here, one senses how the tongue touches almost the visual metaphors, which are being offset by the music that alliteration and assonance make. The speaker in these poems sculpts with light on the ruins of love's noises. We read such lines in the making in the poem "The Last":

> The soil has sieved her, drawn her, steeped her, downed
> And flocked her to the bedding of its ought;
> A granulate, soft sift to silent drifts,
> Lit lightning wince of every saber thought.
>
> The seep unsoled her, souled her, sold her sleep,
> A gravitate of galaxies of she,

The purchase of the ground, her weep to black,
And percolate into infinity.

The settle fractions strew to grid a term:
The snow of her in melting, sinking rime;
And darkness curls in darkness coils about
The velvet bones beneath the skin of time.

A roll suspension rounding on a dearth;
The particles geometry the last
And trace a correlate continuance:
But every torment figured in its cast.

Mark Daniel Cohen continues in these poems not only a solid Shakespearean tradition as we find it particularly in the sonnets, but also lets romanticism transpire through what the language poets practice, such as the denaturalization of the speaker's presence behind the text, and disjunctive methodical approaches to writing. Just as in the plastic arts, where beginnings and endings are crucial, where to begin and when to stop is also crucial in these texts, yet such formal concerns are not expressed at the expense of what happens in the middle, especially when this middle is something that not only eludes the writer, but also the clearly demarcated beginnings and endings. The law of the excluded middle, the law of non-contradiction, is balanced against the law of imaginary logic. The worlds of different experiences and perceptions identified in the poems through an acute sensing of pain do not run parallel and nor do they map directly to any non-dimensional space. Feelings are not linear, but rather hyperbolic and elliptic. As in geometry, where lines can expand or compress, rise or fall, the words in the poems, with their strict con-strictures, are like calculated falling cadences. The images of falling suggest that one doesn't just follow only gravity, but also direction. Sometimes one falls right in the middle of things that are not settled yet, things that swerve in the air. While the ground may be anticipated — I'm falling down there somewhere — it is not being grounded that does it for experience, but being sensual. Senses follow a principle of multiplicity and the array of figures referred to, from literature and the arts, all adopt a both/and position. The point is that while we may inherit some clarity of articulation from following others and their traditions, senses and emotions are often impenetrable.

In the poem "The Conjunction of the Senses" Cohen, again, makes recourse to what can only be contained in parenthesis. Thus he says in parenthesis: "(In all I feel, I feel, I feel myself)" leaving the very form of feeling suspended in a supplement. Here, it can be said that Cohen articulates what Walter Benjamin calls *das Ausdruckslose*, the expressionless. Benjamin was preoccupied with why what he thought to be the obvious object of study in literature and the arts, namely the incomprehensible, always seems to come second to what other critics identify as the means of what language communicates, namely a clear and unambiguous mode of telling. Opposing the view that language is there to always and only follow facts, address people, and communicate in a straightforward fashion through clear and unambiguous words, he puts it:

> For what does a literary work "say"? What does it communicate? It "tells" very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not communication or the imparting

> of information [...] Do we not generally regard that which lies beyond communication in a literary work [...] as the unfathomable, the mysterious, the "poetic"? (Benjamin, 2002: 253)

We find examples of the way in which senses are put to work beyond expression as we know it in poems such as "The Hollow at the Core," where encounters in geometrics are announced as a means of being "face to face to fan in symmetries." The first three lines disclose both a new disturbance and a new arbitrariness in the perception of who stands face to face with whom and why, and we get lost in the sound of "us":

As os arcs arctic argencies spine light.
A throw's a mere extrapolated here,
A man's a mere ascription, nominon.

The likeness of man to no-man, and arctic air with argent extrapolations urge us on to considering the idea that condensed thinking is cold thinking. Cohen permutes arbitrary connections, but he always establishes a symmetrical relation between them. One can follow the trajectory of the "spine light" through some of the other poems, as rocks, stones, and diamonds acquire a specific value. *L'argent* is both a currency and a crown jewel in the arctic kingdom where "the world is waiting for a master that will not come." What comes in the meanwhile are different likenesses to the one master, and we go from encountering King Lear to saluting the return of Antigone who comes back with an "impulsed" mind. It is suggested that these characters' thoughts are as galactic as the planets Mars and Venus, but although grand in their schemes, they are also flawed. In Cohen's poems, if everything 'tells,' it is by way of stoning. Stones are cast, meteorites fall, and diamonds polish the man. As he puts it, stones have tactics, thus allowing us to see them resisting the artist's touch. What the artist can do is put his ear to the ground or the spiral in geometry and listen. The poem "The Eyes Lear Never Lost" discloses how language, with its verbal articulation, can also move from the ear to the eye. This trajectory of following other senses is significant as it is not drawn at the expense of vocabulary. The words thus complement the initial syntactical patterns suggested in the first poem and end up re-creating the hollowness at the gravitational core of the flux density that a line of that poem suggests: "And whispered fields repleat in non on non." Thus enters Lear, symmetrically bound:

> The philosophic gouge, the lesion doubt,
> The shiver thought, the eyes Lear never lost.
> The aspect of interiority
> Condensates to the tears upon, the glance,
> Glare mordant burnish of the circum-stance.
> The made of matter are the tears of time.
> What's phasing matters, what are phasing matters,
> Woof and filler aromatics, steams,
> Wolframiums and texts; and death is death,
> What's dun is done, as figures factor out,
> As dreamer figures on; what's time is thyme.
> And gone is gone, a door gone is adore.

There are characters who enter through doors as if through air, while themselves never opening any doors to anyone. As air creates forms, the forms themselves get shaped by something other than pure void. Formal alterity is thus bypassed, and it is no wonder that we have juxtapositions of cold air and hard rocks as settings for the characters whose integrities are like the integers. Cohen's poems are thus both mineral and numeral. They have solid elements in them, yet they all create beautiful chain reactions in the expressionless, or the uncountable. Structurally, however, while the poems may seemingly express, or rather manifest, a solitary voice, thematically, they engage the reader in a relational aspect of interacting with the solitary and the coming of others. As kingdoms come, seasons come.

As the last poem suggests, after winter, spring always comes. And as in spring, not only lovers go hand in hand, but also their ghosts. And yet, "Idyll of Spring" is courageous enough to forward the idea that although the woman is "it" and always there as she walks along with a strong Apollo, a time comes when she leaves it to him to grow up on his own. A burden, however, as light as the lightness of being itself.

> With carelessness she kneels to kiss the waters.
> Her gesturings are, in this gentle gloom,
> Grandiloquence of indolence that must,
> Despite the ardency that you assume,
> Withdraw to leave you writhing in the dust.

Here one can begin to ask the question: 'what's in a name?' as the temptation is to read Cohen's own name into this volume, and then say, by way of concluding, that the kohen is not a kohen for nothing. He is the guardian of the arts, writing the kind of poetry that dominates and subjugates the sacrificial spot. What the reader wants to do in exchange for being allowed to watch and learn is put himself to the test as a witness who witnesses the ritual of ‘ashes to ashes,’ because ashes bear the traces of torn books, and burnt books, and burnt looks. Then he must turn to listening to the subtle thunder that echoes the cardinals: burn the book, and the numbers, if you can. And we’ll see what happens. An intelligent life accommodates change, and pain is always true. Cohen here coarctates on behalf of all the lovers who want to keep gazing into the spark of the eternal and ineffable fire. Holding their tongues. Forever. And yet.

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